

**RECORD OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION
WITH
MR. TERENCE GILYARD,
PASSENGER ON BOARD THE U.S. PASSENGER VESSEL
*PORT IMPERIAL MANHATTAN***

4 PAGES (INCLUDING COVER)



National Transportation Safety Board
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RECORD OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

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INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY: Donald J. Tyrrell
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National Transportation Safety Board

NAME OF PERSON INTERVIEWED: Mr. Terence Gilyard
Hoboken, NJ

INTRODUCTION

I interviewed Mr. Gilyard in connection with the investigation of the fire on board the U.S. passenger vessel *Port Imperial Manhattan*, which occurred while the vessel was underway in the Hudson River near New York, NY on November 17, 2000. Mr. Gilyard was a passenger on board the vessel at the time that the fire broke out. The text that follows is not a verbatim record of my conversation with Mr. Gilyard. It has been constructed from my hand-written notes of the conversation and is correct and complete to the best of my recollection.

CONVERSATION

Mr. Gilyard is a regular passenger on board New York Waterways ferries that operate between Manhattan and New Jersey. He has been a regular daily passenger since April 2000. He was a passenger on the ferry boat *Port Imperial Manhattan* on November 17, 2000 when a fire broke out in the engine room.

Mr. Gilyard said that he was not given a safety briefing when he came on board the vessel on the day of the fire. He said that he knew where the life preservers were stowed because of the signs posted on board the vessel. Mr. Gilyard said that the

first indication of a problem was about 2-3 minutes after the vessel pulled away from the Manhattan dock to begin the trip to New Jersey when he saw a crewman run to the aft end of the passenger cabin with a fire extinguisher in hand. He said that he did not hear any strange noises up to this time. He looked at another passenger who was seated nearby and both of them shook their heads as if to say, "This does not look good." Mr. Gilyard was seated in a center line seat, aft of midships. Mr. Gilyard said that the crewman "ran to the back" opened a door, and discharged the extinguisher into the open doorway. He said that when the crewman opened the door, he (Mr. Gilyard) saw a little smoke come out and that this was the first time that he actually saw smoke, but it was a small amount and Mr. Gilyard was not concerned because the crewman had an extinguisher. He did not think that the fire was "real big" at that time.

The crew tried to put the fire out with 2 or 3 fire extinguishers but the fire did not go out.

After they were unsuccessful in putting out the fire, one of the crewmen ordered the passengers to go out on deck forward of the main passenger cabin. It did not occur to Mr. Gilyard at this time to reach under the seat to retrieve a life preserver. Mr. Gilyard said that he did not think that the situation was that serious because it seemed to him that the crew had the situation under control.

About 15 minutes after the fire started, after the passengers had gone out onto the deck and closed the door to the cabin behind them, the vessel lost electrical power and the lights went out. Mr. Gilyard estimated that they were out on the deck for about 5 minutes before the lights went out. At the point where they put the second or third extinguisher on the fire and closed the door, Mr. Gilyard said, he "got worried." At this point, the fire was "pretty much burning out of control" with a lot of heavy, black smoke. Mr. Gilyard said that when the lights went out, all of the passengers started to get "rowdy" and "nervous" and started to scream for help to all of the other boats passing by.

One of the passengers went back into the main cabin to get life vests for the rest of the passengers.

There were several other boats in the area. One boat, another New York Waterways ferry, came by, stopped and then kept going. All of the passengers began yelling for that boat to come back and get them. Even the Captain of the *Manhattan* was yelling for that boat to come back, but the boat "sped off." When the ferry sped off, the captain of the *Manhattan*, who had been standing on one of the ladders between the main and upper deck, ran to the pilothouse and started sounding the vessel's horn continuously. Mr. Gilyard believes the captain did this in an attempt to get the ferry to come back. After 30-40 seconds, the horn completely died out. There were other dinner/luxury cruises operating in the area that passed by, but none of them came over to help.

While waiting to be rescued, no announcements were made to the passengers. The crew of the *Manhattan* did try to calm the passengers by saying, "Everything's going to be alright." A couple of passengers asked, "Should I call for help?" "Should I call 911?" The captain said, "We already called the station and a boat is on the way." At this point, we threw two rafts into the water. Mr. Gilyard helped throw one of the rafts into the water. Although the raft was "pretty heavy" Mr. Gilyard said it was not difficult to get the raft into the water. Mr. Gilyard and one other man put one raft into the water and three other men put the second raft into the water. After the raft were in the water, they tied them to the vessel.

About 35-40 minutes after the fire started, a fire boat came by. At the same time, another New York Waterways boat that was coming from the World Trade Center came by. This was approximately 20 minutes after the first New York Waterways ferry had "sped away."

As this vessel approached the *Manhattan*, there was a loud explosion on board and Mr. Gilyard was about to jump into the water when someone [he does not know who] grabbed his arm and said, "Its going to be alright." Mr. Gilyard then stayed on board and awaited the arrival of the rescue ferry. Mr. Gilyard said that everyone was "pretty much panicked" by the explosion.

When the second New York Waterways ferry came close enough to the *Manhattan*, the passengers "jumped" onto the other New York Waterways boat directly from the deck of the *Manhattan*. Mr. Gilyard thinks that all of the passengers were wearing life preservers when they left the *Manhattan*, but he is not sure. After they left the *Manhattan*, the fire boats put the fire out.

When the rescue ferry arrived at the New Jersey dock, an ambulance was waiting, but Mr. Gilyard did not go with them to the hospital because he did not think that he had been injured in the fire. But after going home that night, he said, his eyes began to hurt on Saturday and Sunday. Since then, he has gone to his private physician and who gave him eye drops. Mr. Gilyard believes that his eyes were injured as a result of their exposure to smoke during the fire.

END OF INTERVIEW

Donald J. Tyrrell
Investigator-in-Charge